# Sleeping Sound

*She grips my hand and I squeeze back in response. Laying on the bed we face each other. I see her golden locks of hair partially covering her face. I take my hand and brush them back past her ear showing so I can see her. Beautiful. That’s all that run through my mind. This is all I want, just her and only her.*

THUD!

I wake, adrenaline rushing through me wondering what happened and where I am. Then it comes back to me and I calm myself slowing my breath. Resting from the wall, I stand. A bit dreary, I rub my eyes from under my glasses trying to wipe the tiredness away.

“Really? I wasn’t gone for that long. How in the slacking hell did you fall asleep so quickly?”. Emmet growls in his gruff voice, his large hairy hands slapping the slab of meat that rests on counter.

“Long night, I was busy.” I say dryly.

“Ah, girls. I get it, before I got me self a wife I was always kept up till me candle ran out O’ wax. Sometimes I’d need more than one.” He slides in a wink.

If only. “Actually, I was up late reading some of the books that I got from Alma’s place. She got a few books new books this month and I couldn’t pass up the chance. And you know I never been good with that sorta stuff.”

“Ha, don a worry bout it Rin. You just a late bloomer, you already pretty tall. Get some muscle on ya and the girls will be swooning.” He says with a grin stretched across his face. “You’re the only kid I know that actually reads around here. What were ya readin?”

“Armnent history, mostly about the first models made.” I say it nervously, knowing what he would say.

His face darkens, wrinkles over his brow crinkle as he rubs his temple with two of his fingers. I know it’s bad. I know I am doing wrong, but I just couldn’t resist.

“You know if a Warden catches you with anything related to an Armnent they’ll kill ya on the spot, I can’t believe Alma gave that to ya in the first place, how’d she even get it?” he says in a low, quiet voice.

“Don’t know, she got it smuggled. From where, I could only guess. Either way I can’t stop obsessing over them, the way they work with an Abner body is harmonious and beautiful in its own way.” I say forcefully with passion behind my voice.

“You a bookworm, I know, just be careful. I don’t want Kieran to deal with ya being dead. You know she thinks of you as her child. More so than you think.” saying in a gentleness I wouldn’t expect from him.

He always has been one to be intimidated by. He is a hulk of a man, arms and apron stained with pig’s blood. If he was covered in any more hair you might mistake him for a bear. Kieran, being friends with the guy has kept us safe for the most part, he is a friendly as they come, but you never want to make him mad.

“Don’t worry, I’m smart enough to cover my tracks. Now mind wrapping that up? Leon is waiting for me outside and Kieran wants this before dinner.”

“Aye, I know you a smart kid. Anyways, gimme a sec and I’ll have this wrapped up like a present” he says, voice booming in the shack we’re in. “Also, before I forget can you take this to Kieran? It’s been long overdue.”

“What is it,” I ask inspecting the small black leather bound box.

“Do ya really want me to tell you about Kieran’s personal stuff,” he says with a raised eyebrow.

“Gotcha, if I want to live don’t look,” I say remembering the time I was a kid and looked through her stuff. She was slacking mad, and I have never been so scared.

I pocketed the box and Emmet disappeared behind the counter, a few minutes later appeared with a large sheet of brown paper which he used to cover the meat, tying twine in a cross tightening the paper. Trying to be funny also put a stick on bow on the top of it, his face split in a grin. I tried giving him a blank stare to subtly tell him he is slacking horrible at being funny.

With the meat in hand, I walked out of the small shack. Bell ringing as I opened the door. Outside, the sun blinds me momentarily, eyes adjusting to the light so I can finally see. I look for Leon. Not seeing him at first I spot him on the far end of the dirt road chatting up this girl. Really? He can’t give it a rest? I don’t think he could even go 30 minutes without hitting on a girl, any girl. Though, I do envy him at times.

Surprisingly far I walk along the dirt road, somewhat taking my time so I can soak in the scenery Domas has to offer. The shacks, made of dried, tired wood surround the dirt paths. Dust floats in the air, it is thick and heavy, prompting me to cough violently. You can hear the chatter between other Hollows talking. Trying to get as much they can for what little they have. The currency here are tickets, used to buy from the Wardens that oversee this district. People here provide a service to give to the Abners in exchange for tickets. Here in Domas we work the fields, we’ve got to meet the quota every month, to get paid. Hard work it is, don’t meet the quota and you get next to nothing. The tickets we get we use to buy from the Warden Reserves giving us some the essentials to live here.

The Wardens themselves are appointed Hollows personally selected by an Abner. I’ve, never seen an Abner, but I’ve heard stories from Kieran about them. They stand stall, as beautiful creatures with a refined air to them. They walk with power behind each step, wearing armor that can outshine the sun. Adorned with the body of a god they leap bounds above us, reflexes faster than a wolf, and with the help of the Armnents have the knowledge that no one man can imagine. Truly a marvel. Yet, they are merciful gods. Before we came to this some hundreds of years ago this was a wasteland. The earth was scorched, plants wouldn’t grow, animals would die and it was the fault of old civilization. They worked the earth, abused her until she could give no more. Later burned everything hoping down the line it would reset itself. It didn’t. The Abners, a race far developed compared to us Hollows, came and using some of their technology breathed life back to the land. They later gave it us, but we had to help them in return. We would mine for them, farm for them, build for them and serve them. They are compassionate, giving more than take. If only the Wardens were more like them. Damn them, they are drunk with power taking what they want and giving only what they feel like. The Wardens here especially use the girls here as their own personal whores. The girls couldn’t say no if even if they wanted to because they can ruin them, make them starve by refusing to sell them anything from the Reserves.

Making my way out of the market, I finally caught up to Leon. She’s still there. Mercyhell, we need to be back soon. Still I can’t see myself interrupting them. She’s really pretty. Leon gets all the luck, though it isn’t actually luck it’s just he’s so damn good looking I doubt he has ever had to try very hard to get any girl. It’s like he was made from a crafter, body carved from stone, eyes a piercing blue and his hair swept to one side. She’s smitten with him I’m sure.

Giving up on the idea of corralling Leon away from her, I lay on the grass that wraps the dirt road which leads away from the market. The grass, soft to the touch, is better than the cot I have at home. Old thing it is, just wood and a few sheets of thin fabric. This place is the only green we have here in Domas. Many come here to forget about the harshness of some of the chores we do to fet ourselves tickets. Though I’m sure Leon only comes here to get girls.

I make sure I’m a fair enough distance away that I can keep an eye on Leon without having him hear whatever trivial thing he is spouting. I leave the packaged meat to my side, thankful he was kind enough to give it to us. Meat is too expensive here, I’ve only had it a few times. Damn I wish I had my books with me right now. Definitely would be more fun that way.

As time ticks away my eyes close, I guess I’m having another short nap. Life right now is slow, peaceful.

“Rin, thanks for waiting. I just really wanted to lay some ground work with that one, you ready to go?” he says excitedly, shaking me awake.

“Yeah I got the meat, Kieran going to be mad though. You took your slacking time,” saying it with a slight scowl on my face.

“Yeah, Yeah. I doubt she’ll be that mad, the stalls are still open so we’ve got some time on our hands. You want to kick the old ball around for a bit?”

“Not really, I’ve got things to do plus you know sports aren’t really my thing.”

“Ever since you’ve gotten into those books of yours nothing else has been your ‘thing’. You really have got to stop studying those Armnent things, their only for Abners, not us Hollows. Advanced tech is illegal anyways, so you can’t do much with all that info stuck in your head,” Leon drawls on.

Sure it’s the truth, but I’ve read so my books about these things I am sure I know enough to match a mid-tier crafter. Of course they have the practical experience, slack I wish I got an Armnent for myself, an older model maybe, mercyhell I’d settle for some trashed parts. Even that though is grounds for execution.

“You don’t have to tell me that, but come on these things actually write information to your brain. You don’t have to learn they just become permanent memories, stored like files on a computer.”

“You’ve only used a computer once, what would you even know about that. Books can only get you so far,” he says somewhat to tease me and somewhat to ground me to reality.

Later he tells me about the girl he was taking to on the way back. Her name was Jen. Leon met her while visiting Kieran on the farm where she works. He droned on about how he courted her. I wasn’t listening, I was thinking about the book I was reading earlier before I went off to see Emmet. ‘Armnent History and Design’ it details the basics of how it works and how Abner’s used them back in ancient times to become gods over us Hollows.

Armnent, a forearm modification that replaces the bone and nerves with bio-steel and a computer more advanced with processing power beyond even quantum computing. The computer in the arm reverses the electrical impulses the brain sends to the arm encoding it with gigabits of information. The Armnent in that time micro manages all of the information in your brain finding free space to write the information too. The Armnents use black box chips, cartridges really, the size of a thicker SD card I’ve seen in books detailing old computer storage. These chips created by Sons, Abners of old that passed the formulas of making them down generations. These chips are marvels in of itself, they carry information about any subject, of all history, of all advances in technology in a variety of chips. Over time these chips were referred to as, Pandora I never knew why.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A pain shoots though my back and I stumble forward, caught completely off guard. Mercyhell, what happened?

Leon. His hand had come down like hammer across my back, he always was a strong one. Enough lean muscle covers his body to make me self-conscious of my own lack of muscle.

“You zoned out man, here I was explaining my genius, and here I am getting ignored. Kinda hurt.” He says while he over exaggerates himself crying.

“Right, genius.” I say while rolling my eyes.

We make it to our place, it’s an old two floor shack made completely out of dry, splintered wood that looks like it’ll break if you so much as looked at it. It’s not the best but it’s home. I reach for the knob and turn it slowly, this door creaks loud enough to wake a giant.

In the corner of my eye I seen Leon with the most devilish grin I’ve ever seen plastered on his face. Just then he pushes me with all his strength into the house, so much so I almost fell over.

I’m blind, I see only darkness. My heart beating faster, and faster. The lights are never off the house is never empty. Something is wrong.

I’m scared.